

PARDON AND JUSTIFICATION

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“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”
Psalm 32:1

[Mr. Spurgeon’s expositions of the Psalm, from which the text is taken, were published in sermons #2284, 2556, and 2838]

FEW men judge things correctly. Most people measure by appearances—few know the test of reality. We pronounce the man blessed who grasps the scepter or wears the crown, whereas perhaps no peasant in his dominion enjoys less happiness than he does. We pronounce that man blessed who has uninterrupted and perpetual health, but we know not the secret gnawing of the heart devoured by its own anguish and embittered by a sorrow that a stranger cannot perceive.

We call the wise man happy because he understands all things—from the hyssop on the wall to the cedar of Lebanon—but he says, “Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” We are all for pronouncing our neighbor’s lot happier than our own. As Young says of mortality, “All men think all men mortal but themselves.” And we are apt to think all men happy but ourselves.

But oh! if we could see things as they are. If we were not deceived by the masquerade of this poor life. If we were not so easily taken in by the masks and dresses of those who act in this great drama, be it comedy or tragedy—if we could but see what the men are behind the scenes, penetrate their hearts, watch their inner motions and discern their secret feelings—we should find but few who could bear the name of “blessed”.

Indeed, there are none except those who come under the description of my text, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” He is blessed, thrice blessed, blessed for evermore, blessed of heaven, blessed of earth, blessed for time, blessed for eternity, but the man whose sin is not forgiven is not blessed—the mouth of JEHOVAH has said it and God shall manifest that cursed is every man whose transgression is not forgiven, whose sin is not covered.

Dearly beloved, we come to the consideration of that most excellent and choice blessing of God, which bespeaks our pardon and justification—and we trust that we shall be able to show you its extreme value.

The blessedness of the person enjoying this mercy will appear if we consider, first, *the exceeding value of it in its nature and its characteristics*. Then, if we notice *the things that accompany it*. And afterwards, if we muse upon *the state of heart which a sense of forgiveness would engender*, we shall see that a man, whose sin is covered and whose transgression is forgiven, must indeed be blessed.

I. Let us first look at THE BLESSING AS IT IS.

It is an unpurchaseable blessing. No one could purchase the pardon of his sin. What though we should each offer a hecatomb to our God, the sacrifice would smoke in vain, for “Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.” If we could make rivers of oil as wide as the Amazon and as long as the Mississippi, we could not offer them to God as an acceptable present, for He would be careless at its value.

We might bring money to Him in vain, for He says, “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine.” No oblation can add to His wealth, for He says, “Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills....If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof.”

These are all God's own creatures, so we could only offer to Him what is already His. Nothing that man can present to God by way of sacrifice can ever purchase the blessing of forgiveness.

Next, consider *the utter difficulty of procuring the blessing in any human way*. Since it is not to be purchased, how can it be procured? Here is a man who has sinned against God and he makes the inquiry, "How can I be pardoned?" The first thought which starts up in his mind is this, "I will seek to amend my ways. In the virtue of the future I will endeavor to atone for the follies of the past—and I trust a merciful God will be disposed to forgive my sins, and spare my guilty but penitent soul."

He then turns to Scripture to see if his hopes are warranted and he reads there, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." He fancies that if he should reform and amend his life, he will be accepted, but there comes from the throne of God a voice which says, "Having sinned, O man, I must inflict punishment for thy sin." God is so inflexibly just that He has never forgiven, and will never forgive, the sinner without having exacted the punishment for his sin. He is so strictly true to His threatenings and so inexorably severe in His justice, that His holy law never relaxes its hold upon the sinner till the penalty is paid to the utmost farthing.

"Well," says the sinner, "if I amend for the future, there is the dark catalog of past offenses still pursuing me. Even if I run up no other debts, there are the old accounts—how can I get them paid? How can I get my past sins forgiven? How can I find my way to heaven." Then he thinks, "I will seek to humble myself before God. I will cry and lament, and I hope, by deep penitence, and heart-felt contrition, and by perpetual floods of tears, God may be induced to pardon me."

O man, your tears will not blot out a single sin! Your sins are engraved as in brass and your tears are not a liquid strong enough to burn out what God has thus inscribed.

*"Could thy tears forever flow,
Could thy zeal no respite know,
All for sin could not atone;
Christ must save, and Christ alone."*

You might weep till your very eyes were wept away and until your heart was all distilled in drops, and yet not remove one single stain from the brazen tablet of the memory of JEHOVAH. There is no atonement in tears or repentance. God has not said, "I will forgive you for the sake of your penitence." What is there in your penitence that can make you deserve forgiveness? If you did deserve forgiveness, you would have a set-off against your guilt. This were to suppose some claim upon God, and there would be no mercy in giving you what you could claim as a right. Repentance is not an atonement for sin.

What, then, can be done? Justice says, "Blood for blood, a stroke for every sin, punishment for every crime, for the Lord will by no means clear the guilty." The sinner feels within his heart that this judgment is just. Like the man to whom I talked some time ago, who said, "If God does not damn me, He ought. I have been so great a sinner against His laws that His equity would be sullied by my escape."

The sinner, when convicted in his own conscience, must own the righteousness of God in His condemnation. He knows that he has been so wicked, he has sinned so much against heaven, that God in justice must punish him. He feels that God cannot pass by his sin and his transgression. Then there must be an atonement in order to obtain pardon, he thinks, and he asks, "Who shall effect it?"

Speed your way up to heaven, for it is vain to seek it on earth. Go up there, where cherubs fly around the throne of God and ask those flaming spirits, "Can you offer an atonement? God has said that man must die and the sentence cannot be altered. God Himself cannot revise it, for it is like the laws of the Medes and Persians, irrevocable. Punishment must follow sin and damnation must be the effect of iniquity. But O you blazing seraphs, no satisfaction would be yielded to infinite justice even if you all should die. You angels, I have no hope from you. I must turn my eyes in another direction. Where shall I find help? Where shall I obtain deliverance?"

Man cannot help us. Angels cannot help us—the greatest archangel can do nought for us. Where shall we find forgiveness? Where is the priceless prize? The mine has it not in its depths. Stars have it not in their brilliance. The floods cannot tell me as they lift up their voice—nor can the hurricane's blast discover to me the profound mystery. It is hidden in the sacred counsels of the Most High.

Where it is I know not until, from the very throne of God, I hear it said, "I am the Substitute." And looking up there, I see, sitting on the throne, a God and yet a man—a man who once was slain! I see His scarred hands and His pierced side. But He is also God and smiling benignantly, He says, "I have forgiveness, I have pardon—I purchased it with My heart's blood. This precious casket of divinity was broken open for your souls. I had to die—'the just for the unjust.' Excruciating agony, pains unutterable, and woes such as you cannot comprehend, I had to suffer for your sake."

And can I say that this amazing grace is mine? Has he enrolled my worthless name in the covenant of His grace? Do I see the blood-mark on the writ of my pardon? Do I know that He purchased it with such a price? And shall I refuse to say, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered"?

Nay. I must and will exult, for I have found this jewel, before which earth's diadems do pale and lose their lustre. I have found this "pearl of great price" and I must and will esteem all things but loss for Jesus' sake, for having found this indescribable blessing, which could not be bought except with the precious blood of Jesus, I must shout again, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."

*"Happy the man to whom his God
No more imputes his sin;
But wash'd in the Redeemer's blood,
Hath made his garments clean."*

It would be well for you, Christian, if you would often review this mercy and see how it was purchased for you. If you would go to Gethsemane and see where the bloody clots lie thick upon the ground. If you would then take your journey across that bitter brook of Kedron and go to Gabbatha, and see your Savior with His hair plucked by the persecutors, with His cheeks made moist with the spittle of His enemies, with His back lacerated by the deep ploughings of knotted whips, and Himself in agony, emaciated, tormented—then if you would stand at Calvary and see Him dying, "the just for the unjust"—and having seen these bitter torments, remember that these were but little compared with His inward soul-anguish.

Then you would come away and say, "Blessed, yea, thrice blessed is the man who has thus been loved of Jesus and thus purchased with His blood. 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.'"

Another thing concerning this blessing of justification is, not only its immense value and its unpurchaseableness, but *its coming to us instantaneously*. You know it is a doctrine that has been taught by divines long enough, and taught in Scripture, that justification is an instantaneous act. The moment God gives me faith, I become justified, and being justified by faith, I have peace with God.

It takes no time to accomplish this miracle of mercy. Sanctification is a lifelong work, continuously effected by the Holy Ghost, but justification is done in one instant. It is as complete the moment a sinner believes as when he stands before the Eternal. Is it not a marvelous thing that one moment should make you clean?

We love the physician who heals speedily. If you find a skillful physician who can heal you of a sad disease even in years, you go to him and are thankful. But suppose you hear of some wondrous man who, with a touch, could heal you—who, with the very glance of his eyes, could stanch that flow of blood, or cure that deadly disease, and make you well at once? Would you not go to him and feel that he was indeed a great physician?

So is it with Christ. There may be a man standing over there, with all his sins upon his head, yet he may be justified—complete in Christ, without a sin—freed from its damning power, delivered from all his guilt and iniquity in one single instant! It is a marvelous thing, beyond our power of comprehension. God pardons the man, and he goes away, that same instant, perfectly justified—as the publican did when he prayed, “God be merciful to me, a sinner,” and received the mercy for which he sued.

But one of the greatest blessings about this mercy is that *it is irreversible*. The irreversible nature of justification is that which makes it so lovely in the eyes of God’s people. We are justified and pardoned, but then the mercy is that we can never be unpardoned—we never can be again condemned. Those who are opponents of this glorious doctrine may say what they please, but we know better than to suppose that God ever pardons a man and then punishes him afterwards.

We should not think the Queen would give a criminal a free and full pardon, and then, in the course of a few years, have him executed. Oh, no! I thank God that I can say, and that each of the Lord’s believing people can say,—

*“Here’s pardon for transgressions past,
It matters not how black their cast;
And O my soul! With wonder view,
For sins to come here’s pardon too.”*

It is complete pardon that Jesus gives—for that which is to come, as well as for that which is past.

*“The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives,
Redemption in full through His blood.”*

God never did anything by halves. He speaks a man into a justified condition and He will never speak him out of it again. Nor can that man ever be cast away. O God, do any persons teach that men can be quickened by the Spirit and yet that the quickening Spirit has not power enough to keep them alive?

Do they teach that God first forgives and then condemns? Do they teach that Christ stands surety for a man and yet that the man may afterwards be damned? Let them teach so if they will, but we “have not so learned Christ.” We cannot use words so dishonorable to the blessed Savior, so derogatory to His deity.

We believe that, if He stood as our Substitute, it was an actual, real, effectual deed, and that we are positively delivered thereby. That, if He did pay the penalty for our sin, God cannot by any means exact it twice. That, if He did discharge our debt, it is discharged. That, if our sin was imputed to Christ, it cannot also be imputed to us.

We say, before all men, that heaven itself cannot accuse the sons of God of any sin. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect,” if God has justified and Christ has died? Ah, Christian! You may well stand and wonder at this mighty justification—to think that you are so pardoned that you never can be condemned, that all the powers in hell cannot condemn you, that nothing which can happen can destroy you. But that you have a pardon that you can plead in the day of judgment and that will stand as valid then as now.

Oh, it is a glorious and gracious thing! Go, you who believe in another gospel, and seek comfort in it if you will, but yours is not the justification of the blessed God. When He justifies, He justifies forever, and nothing can separate us from His love.

II. This is the mercy itself. Now I turn to the second point. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,” BECAUSE THAT MERCY BRINGS EVERYTHING ELSE WITH IT.

When I know that I am pardoned, then I can say that all things are mine. I can look back to the dark past and all things there are mine. I can look at the present and all things here are mine. I can look into the deep future and all things there are mine. Back in eternity, I see God unrolling the mighty scroll of the Book of Life and lo, in that volume I read my name. It must be there, for I am pardoned—and whom He calls, He had first predestinated, and whom He pardons, He had first elected.

When I see that covenant roll, I say, “It is mine.” And all the great books of God’s eternal purposes and infinite decrees are mine. And what Christ did upon the cross is mine. The past is mine. The revolutions of all past ages have worked for the good of myself, and my brethren and sisters in Christ.

Standing in the present, I see divine providence and that is mine. Its various circumstances are working together for the good of all the chosen people of God. Its very wheels—though high and wonderful—are working, wheel within wheel, to produce some great and grand effect which shall be for the general good of the church of Christ.

Afflictions are mine to sanctify me—a hot furnace where my dross is taken away. Prosperity is mine to comfort me—a sweet garden where I lie down to be refreshed in this weary journey. All the promises of God are mine. What though this Bible is the prince of books—what though each letter is a drop of honey and it be filled with sweetness—there is not a precious text here which is not mine, if I am a believer in Christ. There is not a promise which I may not say is my own, for all is mine. All these present things I may take without fear, for they are my Father’s gift to me, a portion of my heritage.

I rejoice also to know that all the future is mine, whatever that future may be. I know that, in the future, there shall come an hour when, at God’s command, the long pent-up fires of earth shall start up from between her brazen ribs—her mountains shall be dissolved and the earth shall pass away. But even this last great conflagration is mine.

I know that, on a certain day, I shall stand before the judgment bar of Christ—but that judgment day is mine. I fear it not, I dread it not. I know that soon I must die, but the river of death is mine. It is mine to wash me, that I may leave the dust of earth behind. It is a glorious river, though its waters may be tinged with blackness, for it takes its rise in the mountains of love, hard by the throne of God.

And then after death, there will come the resurrection and that resurrection is mine. In a perfect body, clear as the sun and fair as the moon, I shall live in paradise. And then, whatever there is in heaven is mine. If there is a city with azure light and with jasper walls—it is mine. What though there be palaces there of crystal and of gold, that sparkle so as to dim poor mortal eyes. What though there be delights above even the dream of the voluptuary. What though there be pleasures which heart and flesh cannot conceive and which even spirit itself cannot fully enjoy—the very intoxication of bliss. What though there be sublimities unlawful for us to utter and wonders which mortal men cannot grasp. What though God in heaven does unravel His glory to make His people blessed—all is mine.

The crown is bright and glorious, but it is mine, for I am pardoned. Though I may have been the chief of sinners and the vilest of the vile, if God shall justify me tonight, all things in heaven are mine, however glorious, bright, majestic, and sublime. Oh, is not this a wondrous mercy? Verily, as we consider what comes with the mercy, we must say, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

III. We would that time and bodily strength permitted us to dilate upon this wide subject, but we must pass on to the last point. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” **BECAUSE IT MAKES HIM BLESSED BY THE EFFECTS IT HAS UPON HIS MIND.**

What glorious *peace* it brings to a man when he first knows himself to be justified! The apostle Paul said, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” Some of you in this chapel do not know what peace means. You never had any real, satisfactory peace. “What?” you say, “never had any peace, when we have been happy and merry and joyous?”

Let me ask you, when the morning has appeared after your evening of mirth, could you look back upon it with joy? Could any one of you look back upon it and say, “I rejoice in these unbridled revellings. I always find such laughter productive of a sweet calm to my heart”? No, you could not

unless you are utterly hardened in heart. I challenge you to tell me what fruit you have ever gathered from those things of which you are now ashamed. You know that you have not had any true peace.

When alone in your chamber, and a leaf fell, or some little insect buzzed in the furthest corner, you trembled like the leaves of the aspen and thought perhaps the angel of death was there with a dreary omen. Or passing from the haunts of fashion, you have walked along some lonely road in solitude and your disordered fancy has conjured up all sorts of demons.

You had no peace and you have no peace now, for you are at war with the Omnipotent, you are lifting your puny hands against the Most High God, you are warring against the King of heaven, rebels against His government, and guilty of high treason against the Eternal Majesty. Oh, that you did but know what true peace is—"the peace of God which passeth all understanding"!

I compare not the peaceful mind to a lake without a ripple—such a figure would be quite inadequate. The only comparison I can find is in that unbroken tranquility which seems to reign in the deep caverns and grottoes of the sea—far down where the sailor's body lies, where the seashells rest undisturbed, where there is nought but darkness, and where nothing can break the spell—for there are no currents there and all is still—that is somewhat like the Christian's soul when God speaks peace to him.

There may be billows on the surface, and by these he may be sometimes ruffled, but inside his heart there will be no ebb or flow. He will have a peace that is too deep to fathom, too perfect for the ungodly to conceive—for none but they who prove it know what it is. Such peace that tonight you could lay your head down to sleep, with the knowledge that you would never wake again in this world, as calmly as you could if you knew your days were to be, like Hezekiah's, lengthened out for fifteen years.

When we have peace with God we can lie down and if an angel visited us to say, "Soul, your Master calls you," we could reply, "Tell my Master that I am ready." And if grim Death were to come stalking to our bedside and were to say, "The pitcher is about to be broken at the fountain, and the wheel to be broken at the cistern," we might answer, "We are quite prepared. We are not afraid. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have peace here and we are glad to go and have that peace consummated up yonder in the better world."

Could you all say that? Some of you know that you could not. If I were to go round this building and ask you, you would have to say, "No. I am not at peace with God. I am afraid to die, for I do not know that my sins are blotted out." Well, poor soul, at any rate you will say, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." You know that *he* is blessed, though you are not yourself blessed—and you feel that *you* would be blessed indeed if you could once get your sin covered and your transgression forgiven.

Justification not only gives peace, it also gives *joy*. And this is something even more blessed. Peace is the flowing of the brook, but joy is the dashing of the waterfall when the brook is filled, bursts its banks and rushes down the rocks. Joy is something that we can know and esteem—and justification brings us joy.

Oh, have you ever seen the justified man when he is first justified? I have often told you what I myself felt when first I realized that I was pardoned through the blood of Christ. [The full story of those dark days and of the happy time that succeeded them is told in *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography*] I had been sad and miserable for months, and even years—but when I once received the message, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," verily I could have leapt for joy of heart, for I felt then that I understood the meaning of that text, "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

I remember hearing Dr. Alexander Fletcher, when speaking to children, tell them a simple anecdote in order to illustrate the joy of a man when he gets delivered from sin. He said, "I saw upon the pavement three or four little chimney-sweeps jumping about and throwing up their heels in great delight. And I asked them, 'My boys, why are you making all this demonstration?' 'Ah!' they said, 'if you had been locked up for three months, you would do the same when you once got out of prison.'" I thought it a good illustration and we cannot wonder that people are joyous and glad when, after being long shut up

in the prison of the law, all sad and miserable, they have felt their bonds broken, seen the door of the jail opened, and obtained a legal discharge. What cared they, then, about trials, and troubles, or anything else?

The heart seems scarcely big enough to hold their joy and it bursts out, so that they hardly know what to do or to say. Thus it is at that wondrous hour which comes but once in a Christian's life—when he first feels himself delivered, when God for the first time says to him, “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

I verily think that hour is a fragment of eternity cut off and given us here. I am sure it is a foretaste of the happiness at God's right hand. It is a day of heaven upon earth, that blessed day when God first gives us a knowledge of our own justification. Heaven's bliss itself can scarcely exceed it. We seem to drink of the very wine that saints in glory quaff. We want nothing else—what more can we desire? “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered”—it gives him joy and it gives him peace.

Have you ever noticed one thing that I must mention here? If you have ever had a great trouble, you have found that it has swallowed up all little troubles. Suppose the captain of a ship finds something on deck that is not quite right? He fidgets and worries himself about this, that, and the other. And soon a great storm arises. Big clouds appear and the winds begin to whistle through the cordage. The sails are rent and now the ship is driving before the wind over mountains and into valleys of water. He fears the ship will be wrecked and that he will be lost.

What cares he now for the little things on deck, or the furniture of the cabin, or such things as those? “Never mind about those things,” he says, “the ship is in danger of being lost.” Suppose the cook should run up and say, “I am afraid, sir, the dinner will be spoiled.” What does he say? “The ship,” he says, “may be lost, and that is of much more consequence than the dinner.”

So is it with you. If you once get into real trouble on account of your souls, you will not fret much about the little troubles you have here, for they will all be swallowed up by the one giant alarm. And if you get this everlasting joy into your souls, it will be much the same—it will consume all your smaller joys and griefs. That joy will be like Moses' rod, which ate up all the serpents that the magicians produced before Pharaoh—it will eat up all other joys. It will be enough for you if you can say,—

***“I'm forgiven! I'm forgiven!
I'm a miracle of grace.”***

That is a nice little house of yours. Well, be thankful for it, but yet you can say, “If I had not got it, I should be a happy man.” You have a certain property. Thank God for it, but yet you can say, “If I had not got it, I should be happy in my poverty.” You remember what the poor slave said, “Ah! it's all very well for you freemen to find fault with your lot. Give me freedom and I would want nothing more. Give me freedom and I will gladly live on crusts and drink water—only let me know that I am free—that is all that I desire. Let me stand on God's free soil and feel that no man can say, from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot that I am his, and I will be happy.”

The slave says so, and so may you. If you can but feel yourself justified. If you know that you are delivered, that you are indeed pardoned, that you are beyond the clutches of the law of God, you can rejoice that you know and feel the truth of the saying, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

Now let me ask, in conclusion, *How many such blessed men and women are there here tonight?* How long shall I give you to answer the question? I wish formal preaching were done away with and that we had a little more talking to one another. I wish to lay the formalities of the pulpit aside and talk to you as if you were in your own houses. That, I believe, is the true kind of preaching.

Let me inquire, then, how many of you, my friends, can claim the title of “blessed” because you are justified? Well, I think I can see one brother who puts his hands together, and says,—

*“A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing.”*

“I know I am forgiven.” My brother, I rejoice to hear you speak thus confidently.

But I come to another and I ask—What about you, my friend? “Ah, sir! I cannot say as much as that brother did, but I hope I am justified.” What ground have you for your hope? You know that we cannot properly hope unless we have some grounds for our hope—what are your grounds? Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? “Yes,” you say, “I do believe on Him.” Why, then, do you say, “I hope I am justified”? Dear brother or sister, you *know*, if you really believe on Christ, you have no need to talk about *hope* where you may be certain. And it is always better to use words of confidence when you can. Keep your head as high as you may, for you will find troubles enough to drag it down.

The next one replies,—

*“’Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;—
‘Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His, or am I not?’”*

I have heard a great deal said against that hymn, but I have myself had occasion to sing it sometimes, so I cannot find much fault with it. That state of mind is all very well if it lasts a little while, though not if it lasts a long time, and a man is always saying, “I long to know,” or “I am afraid.”

Paul says, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” You would not have this anxiety always if you were brought to realize your justification in the sight of God. You may have it sometimes, “when the eye of faith is dim,” but I do not like to see people contenting themselves with any measure of faith short of that which apprehends full redemption.

Do not let me distress the weak ones of the flock, for I often say,—

*“Thousands in the fold of Jesus,
This attainment ne’er can boast:
To His name eternal praises,
None of them shall e’er be lost.”*

Their names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life before the world was made. But if any of you are always in distress and doubt, if you never did at any time feel confident, you should begin to be apprehensive, for I think you should now and then get a little higher. You may pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death sometimes, but surely, sometimes the Spirit of God will also carry you up to the top of the mountain that is called, “Clear.”

Yet, if you are still dwelling on this point, “I long to know,” are you not anxious to settle the question? Suppose you do not belong to Christ? Put it in that way—for, in a doubtful case, it is best to look at the worst side—suppose you do not love the Lord? Nevertheless, you are a sinner. You feel that you are a sinner, do you not? God has convinced you that you are a sinner. Well, as long as you can claim sinnership, you can go to His feet. If you cannot go as a saint, you can go as a sinner.

What a mercy this is. It is enough to save us from despair. Even if our evidence of saintship seems clean gone, we have not lost our sinnership. And the Scripture still says, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” And while it says that, we will hang on it.

Another one says, “I don’t know whether I am justified and I don’t care much about it.” Let me tell you, sir, when you will care. When you come near your end, young man, you will care then. You may think you can live very well without Christ, but you cannot afford to die without Him. You can stand very securely at present, but death will shake your confidence. Your tree may be fair to look at now, but when the great testing wind comes, if it has not its roots in the Rock of Ages, down it must come.

You may think your worldly pleasures good, but they will then turn bitter as wormwood to your taste—worse than gall shall be the daintiest of your drinks when you shall come to the bottom of your poisoned bowl.

But there is another who says, “I wish I were justified, but I feel that I am too great a sinner.” Now I like to hear the first part of your speech, but the last is very bad. To say that you are bad, is right—I know you are. You say you are vile and that is true enough, and I hope you mean it. Do not be like some men of whom I have read.

There was a monk who, on a certain occasion, described himself as being as great a hypocrite as Judas. And a gentleman at once said, “I knew it long ago. You are just the fellow I always thought you were.” But up jumped the monk and said, “Don’t you be saying such things as those about me.” His humility was feigned, not felt.

Thus people may make such a general confession as this, “We are all sinners,” who would resist any special charge brought home to their consciences, however true it might be. Say to such an one, “You are a rogue,” and he replies, “No, I’m not a rogue.” “What are you, then? Are you a liar?” “Oh, no!” “Are you a Sabbath-breaker?” “No, nothing of the kind.” And so, when you come to sift the matter, you find them sheltering themselves under the general term sinner, not to make confession, but to evade it. This is very different from a real conviction of sin.

But if you feel yourself to be a real, actual sinner, remember that you are not too bad to be saved, because it is written in Scripture that Christ came to save sinners, and that means that He came to save you, because you are a sinner. And I will preach it everywhere, without limitation, that if a man knows himself to be a sinner, Jesus Christ died for him, for that is the evidence that Christ came to save him.

Let the sinner, then, believe on Jesus as his Savior. Let the “outcasts” come to Jesus, for the psalmist says, “He gathers together the outcasts of Israel.” There is an outcast here tonight. There is a backslider over there who has been cut off from the church years ago. Behold his sad plight. As Achish said of David, “He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him: therefore he shall be my servant for ever.” But he escaped and you shall yet escape. The prey shall not be taken from the Mighty. The lawful captive shall not be taken from Jesus Christ. The Captain of our salvation conquered his soul once, and He will yet save it.

But another says, “I never was a member of a church and I am afraid I never shall be. I am a hardened sinner, a reprobate.” Well, do you confess it? Then hear the word of the Lord—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” “He that believeth”—that is, he that believes *on* Jesus and *in* Jesus, he that casts himself on Christ. Our hymn bids us “venture” on Christ, but that is not right—there is no venturing, it is all safe—he who trusts himself on Christ—throws himself flat on sovereign mercy.

“He that believes”—notice what follows, “and is baptized.” Baptism is to come afterwards, not for salvation, but as a profession of his faith—he that with his heart believes and with his mouth confesses—“He that believeth and is baptized—shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned.”

I dare not leave any word out, whatever any of my brethren may do. Whether a man be baptized or not, if he does not believe, he shall be damned. But the word “baptized” is not put into the last sentence because the Holy Spirit saw there was no necessity for it, for He knew if the ordinance were correctly administered, no person who did not believe would be baptized. So it was the same thing as saying, “He that believeth not shall be damned.”

Oh, may God grant that you may never know the meaning of that last dreadful word, but may you know what it is to be saved by grace divine!

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.